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THE NEXT GREAT TASK OF CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP.

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JESUS founded his kingdom on personal loyalty to himself. The life of that kingdom was to be his life lived again by his disciples in their varied and ever-changing circumstances; the religious thought of that kingdom—the thought of God and the thought of man as the child of God—was to rest forever on the revelation which he had made. That foundation was his very own, though foreshadowed indeed by lawgiver and prophet. The Old Testament was not regarded by him as a sort of sub-foundation of his kingdom, but only as a divine preparation for it.

Evidently it was remote from the thought of Jesus that the foundation of his kingdom was, or could ever become, in any degree inadequate. He finished his work; he fully uttered his message; he perfectly made known the character of God. He left no stone in the foundation of his kingdom for his apostles to lay. To them, as to us, was intrusted the work of interpreting, extending, and consummating the kingdom of God. Founder there was none other than Jesus. And the apostles recognized this. They preached not themselves, but Jesus as Lord. They had no thought of adding to his revelation. He was to them the final wisdom of God.

Plain and unquestionable though the relation of Jesus to his kingdom, in his own thought, appears to be, it has largely failed of recognition among his followers, even from the beginning of Christian history. Nor is this altogether strange. The kingdom of God was founded among the Jews, over whose thought and life the Old Testament exercised so profound an influence that Jewish disciples could not at once appreciate the newness and absoluteness of the gospel. They thought of Jesus as another David, who, though departed from the earth, should yet come again in a visible manner and reign over a material kingdom. They continued to worship in the Jewish temple. They read Jesus into their Scriptures rather than read their

Scriptures in the light of Jesus. Some of them struggled long and bitterly against the new doctrine that a gentile might become a Christian without first becoming a Jew by circumcision.

Moreover, this Jewish bias in the conception of the gospel found some support in the attitude of Jesus toward the ancient revelation, for he neither broke with the religion of the Old Testament, nor did he in explicit terms release his disciples from the law. He left them to find a natural release from the old ideas as they should come into a fuller appreciation of the new.

Again, the absolute relation of Jesus to his kingdom was early obscured by the church's conception of Scripture. This leveled the Old Testament up with the New, and made no distinction between the inspiration of Moses and that of Jesus. All Scripture was regarded as of one piece, a homogeneous divine book. What pre-eminence could be given to the word of Jesus in the gospel when the entire Bible was believed to be the very word of God? Hence the fathers of the early centuries, who developed that body of doctrines which has since been dominant in the church, were quite indifferent as to the source from which they drew their biblical proof. Athanasius, for example, developed his doctrine of the person of Christ out of the eighth chapter of Proverbs with perfect serenity and assurance. That passage was just as authoritative for him, and apparently had as clear a christological content, as the teaching of the gospel itself. This method of treating Scripture was characteristic not only of the great leaders of the early church, but also of the scholars of the Reformation, and it has continued to flourish even down to the present day.

But plainly this theory of Scripture ignores the claim of Jesus that he gave the perfect and final revelation of God. It violently wrests from that revelation its divine supremacy, and makes the teaching of the Master of the same authority as that of any author of Scripture. Thus it does away with the great truth of the *development* of revelation, which Jesus recognized, and in the place of the depths and heights of Scripture it presents us a dead level from Genesis to the Apocalypse.

Turn back for a moment to the statement that the relation which Jesus claimed to hold to his kingdom has largely failed of recognition.

Proof of this failure is not far to seek. Take as a single instance the common doctrine of the person of Jesus. The early theologians found their biblical material for this doctrine almost exclusively in the Old Testament. They did not go to the gospel and to Jesus for it. Some advance was made by the theologians of the Reformation, for they drew their material for the doctrine chiefly from the New Testament. But still they made no distinction between the revelation in Jesus and the teaching of any contributor to the New Testament. They appealed more frequently to the epistles than to the gospel, to Paul than to Jesus. And hence it is that no one of the great creeds or systems of theology gives us a doctrine of the person of Jesus which is based, where the final doctrine on the subject must surely be based, on the revelation in Jesus himself. One might cite with equal force the church's doctrine of God, or of Scripture, or of the Christian life, in almost any one of their numerous subdivisions. They do not recognize the absoluteness of the gospel. They are not built on the revelation in Jesus. They do not claim to be. They rest rather on the entire religious literature of the Jews, and hence are a blending of many elements of widely diverse authority.

But the claim of Jesus is again making itself heard in his church. The historical investigation of the past two generations has begun to break the reign of a false theory of the Bible, and every forward step of scientific biblical study helps to exalt Jesus and his revelation.

The next great task of Christian scholarship, continuing this exaltation of Jesus, is to make the revelation of God in him the sole foundation of Christian doctrine. The importance of this task, like that of obedience to Jesus, is immeasurable. Its accomplishment must inevitably bring a wide and vital transformation of Christian teaching, for the supremacy and sufficiency of the word of Jesus is the most radical of all his claims.

To make the revelation of God in Jesus the sole foundation of essential Christian doctrine will mean a vast simplification of that doctrine in all its parts. But more important even than that result, it will mean a mighty reinforcement of the practical power of Christian doctrine, for it will then be constantly felt that behind this doctrine stands Jesus Christ. Moreover, thus to simplify and vitalize the doctrine of the church, to make it bear the proportion and empha-

sis which Jesus gave to the various parts of his revelation, will, we may hope, open a new missionary era of apostolic glory.

Not this alone. To make the revelation in Jesus the sole foundation of Christian doctrine, inasmuch as that basis is one of historical fact and not of speculation, will help to take away the long and heavy reproach of Christian theology as unscientific. It will bring theology down to the earth and into fellowship with modern thought.

This next great task of Christian scholarship is not a task for a year or even a generation. It is vast and many-sided, variously and deeply related to religious thought and institutions. The way to its achievement, though illuminated by the plain word of the Master, will doubtless, like all ways to great ends, be found to be rough and toilsome. Let it be so. No workman will faint who knows that by his work, though only in some very humble degree, a great truth is being established, and Jesus in a new and fuller sense is receiving his due.